

Groom among seven held over nikah of underage girl

By Our Correspondent

BAHAWALPUR: Mailsi police booked seven persons, including groom and nikah registrar, for allegedly arranging the nikah of a minor girl with a man in Basti Nonarian of mauza Ojla in Vehari district on Sunday.

According to the police , the case has been registered on the complaintof police officials.

In the FIR, it has been alleged thata woman, Khalida Mai, wife of one Ramzan of mauza Ojla, in connivance with two suspects Riaz Hussain and Zahoor Hussain, arranged the nikah ofher 12-year-old ' daughter 'F' with one Akbar.

According to police sources,the nikah of the couple was solemnised by nikah registrar Nazir Siddique,while two suspects, Safdar and Shaukat Hussain of Abdullah Colony, Mailsi, were the witnesses. None of the suspects have so far been arrested.

ILLEGAL HUNTING: The wildlife department officials in a raid on some shops in Vehari arrested two suspects for their alleged involvement in illegal hunting and trade of birds.

According to the department, senior wildlife rangers officer Rehman Ali and his assistant Ateel, during a raid on shops on Joyia Road in Vehari, arrested Umair and Azam Raza over illegal hunting and sale of birds and booked them under the Punjab Wildlife Act.

Man arrested for torturing wife, aborting pregnancy

By Our Correspondent

BAHAWALNAGAR: A man was arrested on Sunday on charges of torturing his wife for bringing inadequate dowry and aborting her pregnancy in order to marry again.

The FIR registered with the A Division Police alleged that Sidra Saleem of Faisal Colony married her cousin, Muhammad Arshad, seven months back. Her family gave her dowry according to their means but her husband and in-laws used to taunt and torture her over it.

When Sidra got pregnant two months ago, Arshad's sister Javeria, a certified nurse, allegedly administered her injection at home to terminate the pregnancy. Arshad's family told Sidra that they would bring a new bride who would bring better electric appliances and devices as her dowry. It went on to say that on Jan 15, Sidra's husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law tortured her and threw her out of the house.

Later, her maternal aunt admitted her to the DHQ Hospital. She is still undergoing treatment at the hospital.

It is worth mentioning that the police took action after a video of the woman lying in the DHQ Hospital giving a statement against her in-laws made rounds on social media.

FINE: The deputy commissioner has fined a parking contractor of the DHQ Hospital following complaints about excessive fees imposed by the parking stand.

According to the officials, DC Bahawalnagar Zulfiqar Ahmad Bhoon paid a surprise visit to the DHQ Hospital to inquire about the problems of the patients. Meanwhile, several patients and their attendants complained to the DC about the cycle stand staff's aggressive behaviour and charging more than the allowed fees.

The DC found the complaints against the stand staffers to be valid and fined the stand contractor Rs200,000.



LAHORE: Children frolicking on a swing at Bagh-i-Jinnah. — Online

Cotton supply at ginning factories indicates stagnant production

Ginners call for ban on sugarcane cultivation in cotton zones; say the challenge has shifted from production to consumption

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has released provisional national cotton production figures, showing that by Jan 15, 2026, a total of 5.49m bales arrived at ginning factories across the country.

This is only 7,000 bales higher than the output recorded during the same period last year, indicating near stagnation in cotton production.

According to the PCGA report, 2.58m bales reached ginning factories in Punjab, while 2.91m bales arrived in Sindh. Compared to the same period last year, cotton arrivals in Punjab declined by 4pc whereas Sindh recorded a 4pc

increase.

The data reveals that textile mills purchased 4.84m bales from ginning factories while exporters bought 176,000 bales. Around 479,000 bales are still available for sale with the ginners.

At present, only 127 ginning factories are operational. Of them 91 are in Punjab while 36 are in Sindh.

The PCGA officials noted that during the past two weeks alone, 46 ginning factories in Sindh and 50 in Punjab became non-operational—far more than market expectations.

The association also reported a sharp upward trend in cotton prices over the past week, with prices rising by Rs300 per maund to reach around Rs16,500 per maund. The increase has been attributed to the extremely limited availability of quality cotton in the domestic market and rising international prices of cotton yarn and fabric.

Cotton Ginners Forum Chairman Ihsanul Haq says that despite Pakistan's cotton production remaining nearly 50pc below annual targets for several years, the real challenge has now shifted from

production to consumption. He attributes this to the excessive cultivation of sugarcane in traditional cotton zones, which has not only reduced cotton acreage but also caused environmental pollution that had adversely affected cotton quality.

As a result, he says, many textile mills are forced to import high-quality cotton to fulfill export orders, putting severe pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves. He urges federal and provincial governments to strictly enforce crop zoning laws instead of spending billions of rupees on cotton revival projects. He calls for a complete ban on sugarcane cultivation and the establishment of new sugar mills in cotton zones, which can help restore national cotton production to around 15m bales.

Haq warns that record decline in exports, soaring production costs for exporters and highly lenient import policies have pushed the cotton sector to the brink. More than 150 textile units have shut down completely, many others are operating partially, and hundreds of ginning factories have become inactive,

placing the entire cotton industry 'on a ventilator'.

He cautions that if 'oxygen' is not immediately provided to the cotton sector, the national economy itself can slip into 'coma'. He points out that Pakistan's cotton industry faces some of the highest electricity, gas, and markup rates in the world, along with multiple high-rate taxes and excessive intervention by various federal and provincial departments, all of which have sharply increased production costs and eroded export competitiveness.

Calling the current situation the worst economic crisis in the industry's history, Ihsanul Haq urges governments to prioritise industrial revival over cash handouts.

He suggests that instead of spending around Rs1 trillion on welfare schemes such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and Ramadan packages, these funds should be directed toward reviving industries, which would not only strengthen the economy but also significantly reduce unemployment and poverty.

Suthra Punjab enters ‘correction phase’

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: The provincial government's flagship project – “Suthra Punjab Programme” – has entered its “correction phase” in a bid to resolve the issues identified last year. The project, according to the government, is the largest cleanliness programme, collecting and disposing of nearly 50,000 tonnes of solid waste on a daily basis in all cities, towns, union councils and villages across Punjab.

“The most important aspect of this mega programme is admitting the issues and gaps we have witnessed in the phase-1 that ended on December 31st, last year. So, 2026 is the year of correction. And we can say that Suthra Punjab programme has entered its correction phase from January 1,” Suthra Punjab Authority's Director General Babar Sahib Din explains in a talk with Dawn.

The Maryam Nawaz-led Punjab government had launched the programme in December 2024 after taking over the charge to overcome the lack of a cleanliness mechanism in the districts, except the metropolitan, municipal or urban areas of a few major cities. All other district and tehsil headquarters had a very old system that had almost collapsed.

In villages, union councils and small towns, no cleanliness system ever existed, which meant it was only available to 20 to 30 million people residing in a few major cities, and a majority of the population (around 100m or so) had no such system. This all forced the government to launch the project across the

province to collect and dispose of around 50,000 tonnes of solid waste daily, including 35,000 tonnes of garbage that was not being collected and disposed of at all, resulting in serious environmental and health issues.

The DG says the first problem the officers identified was that the number of monitoring officials to supervise cleanliness on major roads was low, which is now being increased in the total 200,000 sq km populated area of Punjab, having 80,000 provincial and district highways.

Similarly, it was also noted that the city areas should have a second shift of sanitary workers, which is being arranged now. Another problem that was identified was the low number of workers in union councils. Last year, each UC had six workers, but the number is being increased to 16 to ensure proper cleanliness. Likewise, the number of equipment will also be increased in UCs.

Previously, the waste management companies existed only in divisional headquarters, which are now being expanded to all district headquarters. “In various districts, the waste management agencies have been set up,” he says.

He says that due to the unavailability of a legal framework, the government has no mechanism to engage local or international companies in its waste-to-energy plans — the first proposed forLahore to generate 40 to 50MW electricity. In the correction phase, the legal framework is being prepared for the purpose.

To a question, he says the programme's total human resource strength has reached 150,000 workers and

other staffers. Similarly, the number of equipment/ machinery has also increased to 30,000 units engaged in collecting and disposing off 45,000 to 50,000 tonnes of solid waste daily.

To another question, the DG says the government's role will be limited to facilitating the parties interested in participating in the bidding for waste-to-energy projects and providing potential electricity buyers, such as Sundar Industrial Estate, Orange Line project, city's electric bus system, Knowledge Park, etc.

Sharing details about the role of the private sector, he said the private companies have invested Rs120 billion in the programme by procuring machinery and other resources. The government didn't spend even a penny on this, as the project is designed on a public-private partnership (PPP) model. “Previously, the government used to spend Rs45 billion annually for the cleanliness of a few major cities havingpopulations over 20 to 30 million. But now only Rs70 billion are being spent on the total population of 130m in terms of solid waste management by providing subsidy,” he explained.

To another question, he said the entire system, right from human resource to machinery to waste collection and disposal is digitised and being monitored online. According to him, the private companies engaged in the project are developing 150 landfill sites in cities and towns that never existed before.

“We are heading fast towards holding a Guinness World Records event in Lahore, and hopefully this programme will be entered in the Guinness Book of World Records,” he maintained.

LITERARY NOTES

Impact of AI on literature and culture

By Rauf Parekh

IN FEBRUARY 2006, Karachi's Academy Bazyaft published a book titled *Masnoo'ee Zahaanat*. A literal translation of the English compound artificial intelligence, the title sounded a bit strange as in those days, artificial intelligence was something that common readers knew very little of, at least in this part of the world. Written by Baqar Naqvi, the book was one of the earliest works in Urdu on artificial intelligence.

Today, 20 years later, artificial intelligence has become something quite familiar and is now usually referred to as AI. It has become enormously advanced and is impacting almost every field of human endeavour, but we still have very few works on AI written in Urdu. This shows the trend that increasingly favours disseminating scientific knowledge in English rather than in our national language.

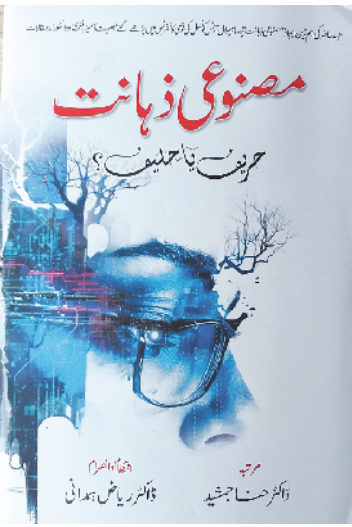
Whether we read it in Urdu or English, the fact is we still don't realise the drastic change that AI is going to bring into our lives. So much so that, according to some experts, AI could pose an existential threat to human beings in not-so-distant future.

But Punjab Arts Council, Sahiwal, realised that AI was something that could be a challenge for arts, culture and literature and it needed to be discussed. So, they organised a conference on the topic of 'Artificial Intelligence, Literature and Culture: Issues, Perils and Possibilities'. Scholars and academics were invited to Sahiwal to deliberate on AI and its impact, especially on literature, languages, economy and culture. The aims and objectives of the conference were, among other things, to have a global perspective on Urdu literature, to see literature against the backdrop of folk culture and to strengthen local cultural identities in the wake of cultural

imperialism unleashed through AI.

The papers read out during the conference have now been published in a book form. Titled *Masnoo'ee Zahaanat: Hareef Ya Haleef?* (artificial intelligence: rival or ally?), it is compiled by Dr Hina Jamshed and published by Misaal Publishers, Faisalabad.

The book contains over 30 papers on various topics concerning AI and its impact on society vis-à-vis teaching of literature and language, translation, creative writing, feminism, digital fiction and the perils posed by AI to literature. Dr Riaz Hamdani, the director of Arts Council, in his intro writes that AI indeed opens up new vistas of human knowledge, literature and aesthetics, but at the same time one feels that in the new scheme of things only those nations will survive that have a vision to see knowledge in the light of culture and civilisation and put knowledge before economy, not the other way round. The use of AI involves not only data,



algorithms and machine learning but concerns human feelings, too, which seeks meaningfulness as well as utility, adds Hamdani.

The topic of Nasir Abbas Nayyar's

keynote address was AI and the creation of literature, deliberating on the perils and prospects of literature to be created in future. It raised some thought-provoking questions, too. Briefly narrating the history, Nayyar said since 1950's, when it began with machine learning, AI has come a long way and has transformed itself into a truly revolutionary invention. Coming to the literature created by AI, Nayyar said we have two choices: either we accept the literature created by AI as part and parcel of our literature or we differentiate the literature written by human beings from literature created through AI.

In the first case, says Nayyar, we would have to give up whatever little creativity we have. This would be the death of the author and the death of human beings as the name of the concerned chatbot would replace the name of the author on books and articles. But if we decide to differentiate the actual literary

works created by humans from the ones made up by AI, we will have to establish a quantitative measure, though reckoning that measure is not easy.

Dr Anwaar Ahmed said AI is an extended, mechanical intelligence, which cannot produce another Mir or Ghalib, neither Majeed Amjad nor Manto. Dr Najeeb Jamal said with the help of AI it would be easy to read and understand Urdu's classical literature preserved in the form of manuscripts and this would profoundly affect textual criticism. Other papers read out during the conference included ones by Aurangzeb Niazi, M. Khalid Fayyaz, Ashraf Kamal, Hina Jamshed and many others. One feels some ethical questions, too, should have been raised in this age of misinformation and fake news.

It is heartening that Sahiwal Arts Council has been organising conferences on literary and cultural issues. One hopes they will keep it up.